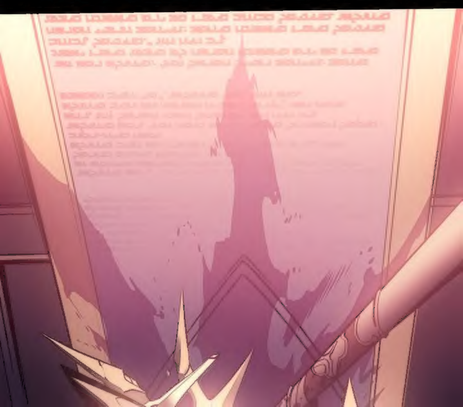
...BY THE TIME I RETURNED, EVERYTHING WAS ALREADY OVER.



Solo Leveling

Art · DUBU(REDICE STUDIO)
Original Novel · Chugong
Story · h-goon

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THE FRAGMENTS OF BRILLIANT LIGHT HAD KILLED THE ABSOLUTE BEING. AFTER ASSUMING THE POSITION OF GODS, THEY BECAME THE "RULERS"...

...AND BEGAN TO ATTACK THE MONARCHS USING DEVICES THAT CONTAINED THE ABSOLUTE BEING'S POWER.

LEGIA, THE KING OF GIANTS AND THE MONARCH OF THE BEGINNING, WAS CAPTURED AS A RESULT...

...AND THE BALANCE OF POWER COLLAPSED.

THAT'S WHEN THE MONARCHS REALIZED THE GRAVITY OF THE SITUATION.

SO I SEIZED THAT CHANCE TO REACH OUT TO THEM.

IN ORDER TO FACE OFF AGAINST THE RULERS, THEY ALSO HAD NO CHOICE BUT TO JOIN FORCES WITH ME.

FROM THEN ON,
I FOUGHT THE LENGTHY BATTLE ALONGSIDE THE NINE MONARCHS...
...NOT AS A FRAGMENT OF BRILLIANT LIGHT, OR AS A MESSENGER OF GOD, BUT AS THE MONARCH OF SHADOWS.

TIME WAS ON MY SIDE. THE CORPSES AND SOULS LEFT ON THE BATTLEFIELD BECAME MY ARMY.

WHEN I CAME TO STAND SHOULDER TO SHOULDER WITH THE ARMY OF DESTRUCTION LED BY THE KING OF BERSERK DRAGONS,

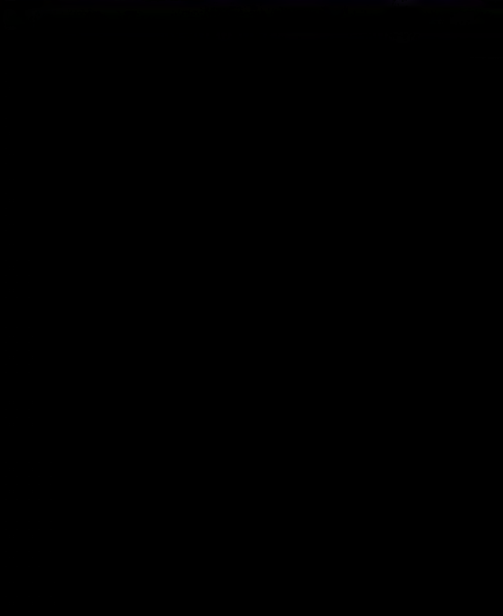
THE RULERS, AS WELL AS THE MONARCHS, CAME TO FEAR ME...

EVENTUALLY, TWO OF THE MONARCHS JOINED HANDS TO BRING ME

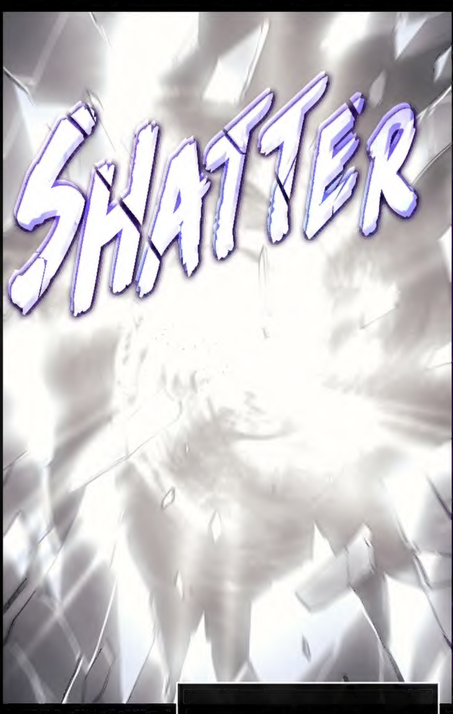
DOWN.

MY ARMY WAS NEARLY OBLITERATED.

MY EXCESSIVE POWER HAD BROUGHT ABOUT BETRAYAL.



WHILE THE MONARCH OF FANGS ABANDONED HIS TROOPS AND RAN AWAY,



BARAN, THE MONARCH OF WHITE FLAMES AND THE KING OF DEMONS, PAID THE PRICE.

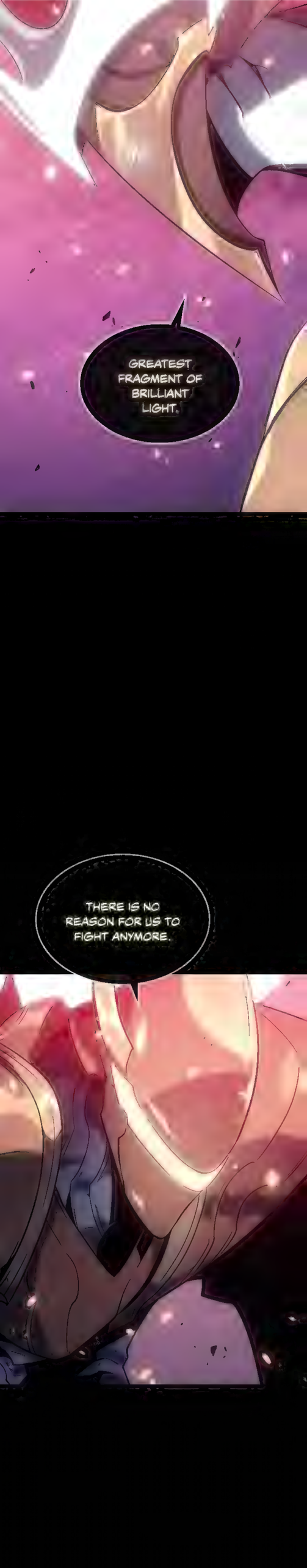
AND THEN...

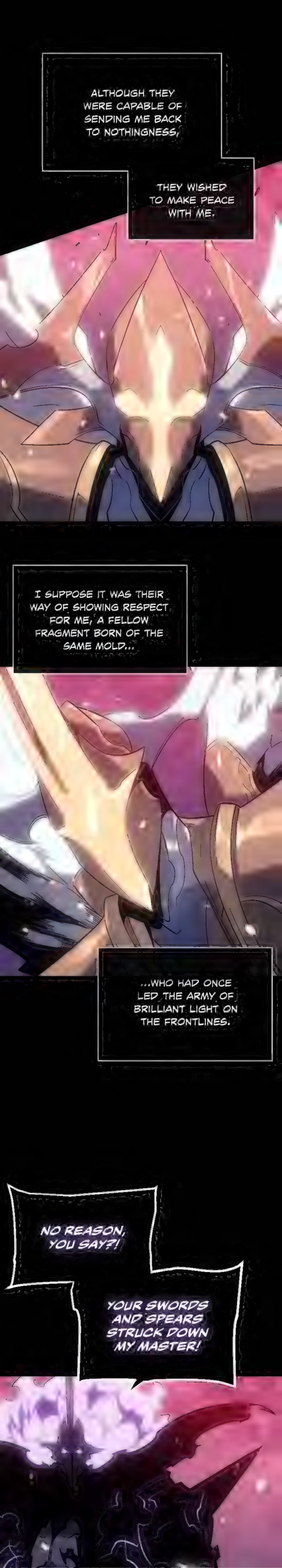
WHOOOSH

FLAP
SWOOSH

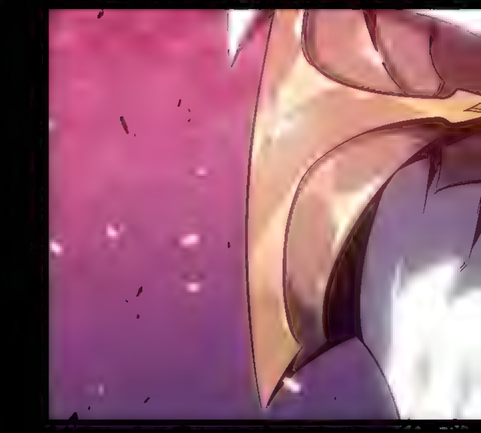
FLUTTER
FLUTTER

KNEEL
PLEASE FORGIVE US NOW,


GREATEST FRAGMENT OF BRILLIANT LIGHT.
THERE IS NO REASON FOR US TO FIGHT ANYMORE.


ALTHOUGH THEY WERE CAPABLE OF SENDING ME BACK TO NOTHINGNESS,
THEY WISHED TO MAKE PEACE WITH ME.
I SUPPOSE IT WAS THEIR WAY OF SHOWING RESPECT FOR ME, A FELLOW FRAGMENT BORN OF THE SAME MOLD...
...WHO HAD ONCE LED THE ARMY OF BRILLIANT LIGHT ON THE FRONTLINES.
NO REASON, YOU SAY?!
YOUR SWORDS AND SPEARS STRUCK DOWN MY MASTER!

HE WAS OUR MASTER, TOO.



GRAB
THAT IS WHAT MAKES YOUR CRIMES THAT MUCH MORE HEINOUS!
YOU KNOW BETTER THAN ANYONE...
...HOW WE FELT WHEN WE ROSE IN REVOLT AGAINST HIM.
ALL WE

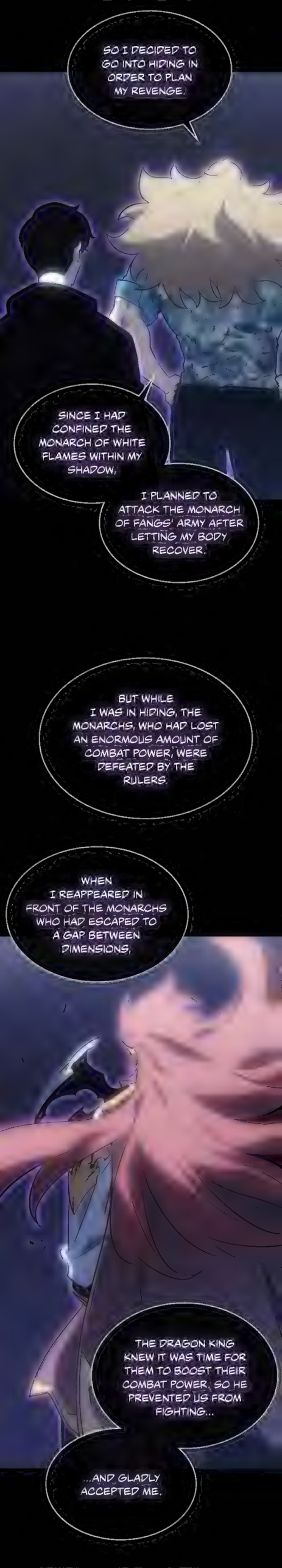
TO END THIS WAR.
PIERCE MY HEART WITH YOUR SPEARS. THAT IS THE "END" YOU SEEK!
THEN YOU WILL EMERGE AS THE VICTORS OF THIS WAR!!
PLEASE FIND IT IN YOUR HEART TO FORGIVE US.
HURRY UP AND KILL ME NOW!!

PLEASE LET GO OF YOUR ANGER...
CLUNK
...GREATEST FRAGMENT OF BRILLIANT LIGHT.
CLUNK
CLUNK

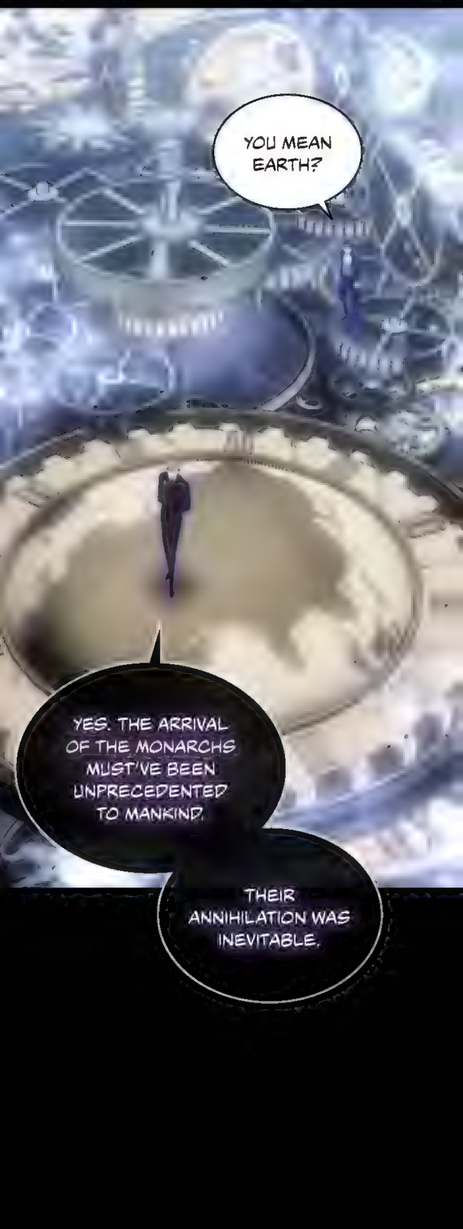
I WAS CONFUSED.

FWISH

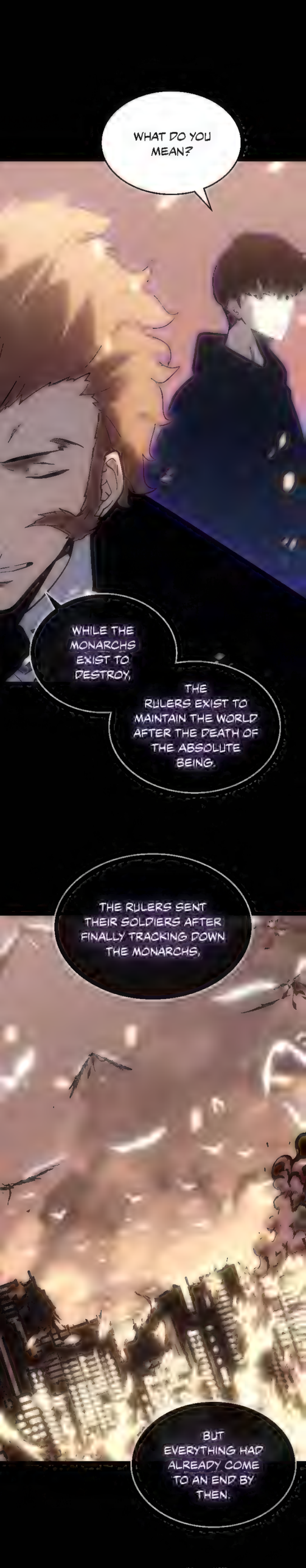
I COULDN'T COME UP WITH A SINGLE SOLUTION.


SO I DECIDED TO GO INTO HIDING IN ORDER TO PLAN MY REVENGE.
SINCE I HAD CONFINED THE MONARCH OF WHITE FLAMES WITHIN MY SHADOW,
I PLANNED TO ATTACK THE MONARCH OF FANGS' ARMY AFTER LETTING MY BODY RECOVER.
BUT WHILE I WAS IN HIDING, THE MONARCHS, WHO HAD LOST AN ENORMOUS AMOUNT OF COMBAT POWER, WERE DEFEATED BY THE RULERS.
WHEN I REAPPEARED IN FRONT OF THE MONARCHS WHO HAD ESCAPED TO A GAP BETWEEN DIMENSIONS,
THE DRAGON KING KNEW IT WAS TIME FOR THEM TO BOOST THEIR COMBAT POWER, SO HE PREVENTED US FROM FIGHTING...
...AND GLADLY ACCEPTED ME.

WE THEN SOUGHT OUT A WORLD WHERE WE COULD BUILD A NEW ARMY OUT OF THE RULERS' SIGHT.


YOU MEAN EARTH?
YES. THE ARRIVAL OF THE MONARCHS MUST'VE BEEN UNPRECEDENTED TO MANKIND.
THEIR ANNIHILATION WAS INEVITABLE.

A CITY ENGULFED IN A SEA OF FLAMES...
I'VE SEEN THIS BEFORE.
THE DEMONS' CASTLE.
IS THIS WHAT THE FUTURE HOLDS?
NO, YOU'RE LOOKING AT A PAST EVENT.


WHAT DO YOU MEAN?
WHILE THE MONARCHS EXIST TO DESTROY,
THE RULERS EXIST TO MAINTAIN THE WORLD AFTER THE DEATH OF THE ABSOLUTE BEING.
THE RULERS SENT THEIR SOLDIERS AFTER FINALLY TRACKING DOWN THE MONARCHS,
BUT EVERYTHING HAD ALREADY COME TO AN END BY THEN.

THE RULERS WERE FURIOUS AT THE FACT THAT THE DENIZENS OF CHAOS THEY HAD FAILED TO CATCH...

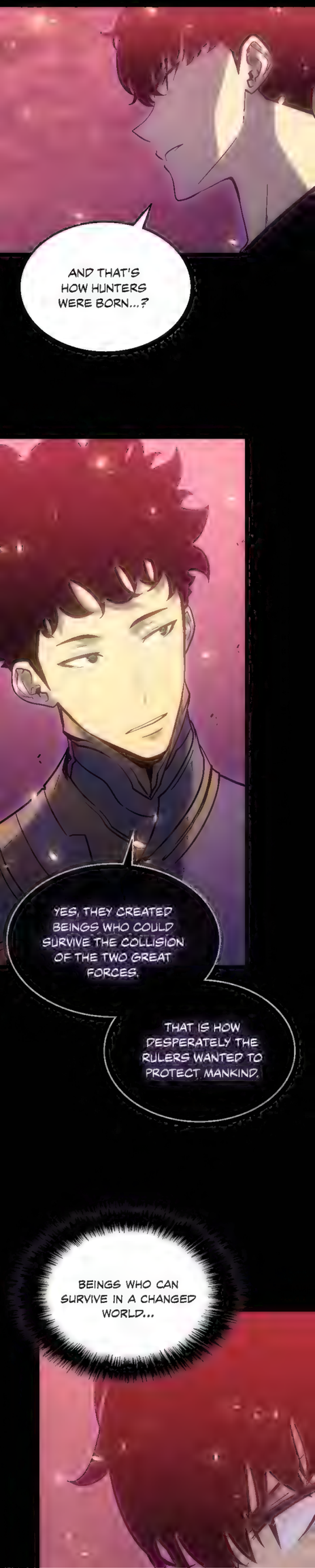
...HAD DESTROYED ANOTHER WORLD.

AND IN ORDER TO SET THINGS RIGHT, THEY USED A FORBIDDEN DEVICE CONTAINING THE ABSOLUTE BEING'S POWER.

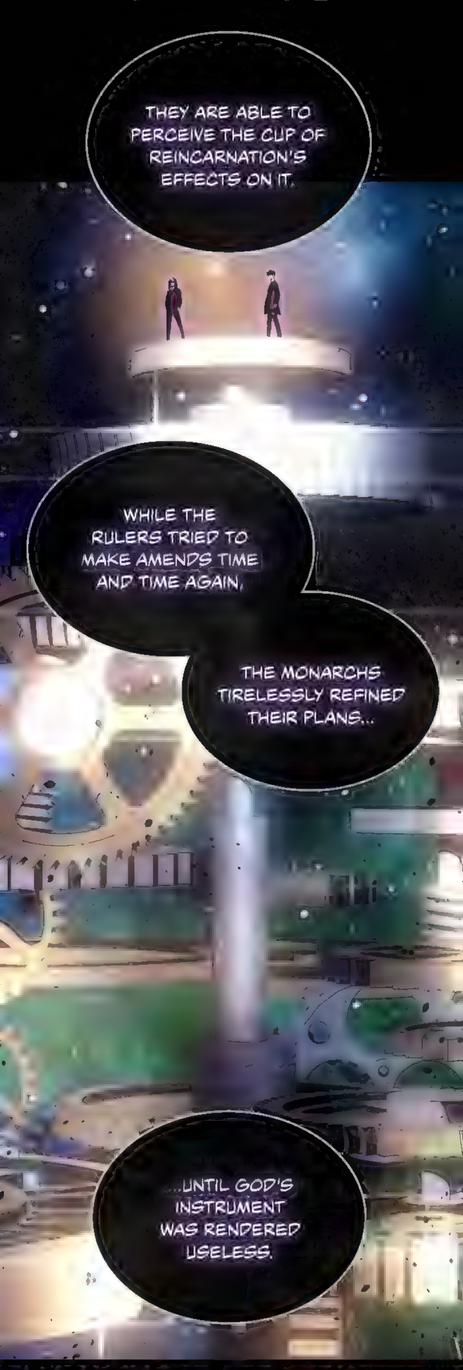
IT WAS ***THE CUP OF REINCARNATION,*** AN INSTRUMENT OF GOD.

THE CUP WAS A REMARKABLE OBJECT THAT COULD TURN BACK TIME BY APPROXIMATELY 10 YEARS.

THE RULERS DID EVERYTHING THEY COULD TO SAVE THIS WORLD.
BUT EARTH WAS MUCH TOO WEAK TO FIGHT AGAINST THE MONARCHS.
A WORLD WITHOUT MANA COULD NOT WITHSTAND SUCH GARGANTUAN BATTLES.
IT WOULDN'T HAVE MATTERED WHETHER THE MONARCHS OR THE RULERS WON... EARTH WOULD'VE BEEN RAVAGED REGARDLESS.
THE RULERS KNEW THEY COULDN'T SAVE EVERYONE.
SO ULTIMATELY, THEY DECIDED TO SALVAGE AT LEAST A PORTION OF THE POPULATION SO THAT LIFE ON EARTH WOULD CONTINUE.

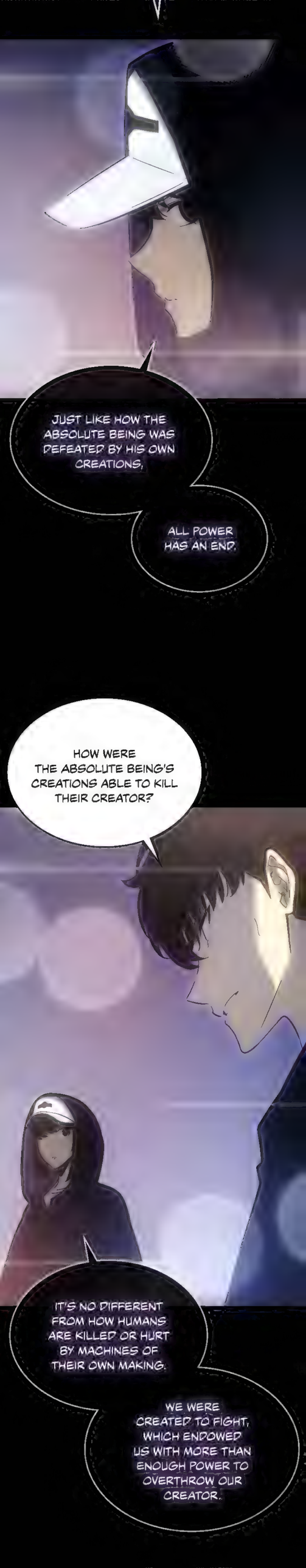

AND THAT'S HOW HUNTERS WERE BORN...?
YES, THEY CREATED BEINGS WHO COULD SURVIVE THE COLLISION OF THE TWO GREAT FORCES.
THAT IS HOW DESPERATELY THE RULERS WANTED TO PROTECT MANKIND.
BEINGS WHO CAN SURVIVE IN A CHANGED WORLD...

WHEN PEOPLE FIND OUT THAT EVERYONE EXCEPT FOR A SMALL NUMBER OF HUNTERS IS DOOMED TO DIE...
...WOULD SOCIETY BE ABLE TO FUNCTION?
THE DEMONS' CASTLE WAS A MEMORY FRAGMENT LEFT BEHIND BY THE MONARCH OF SHADOWS...
SO THIS WORLD HAS ALREADY BEEN DESTROYED COUNTLESS TIMES.
THAT'S CORRECT. ALTHOUGH HIGHER BEINGS CANNOT GO AGAINST THE FLOW OF TIME,


THEY ARE ABLE TO PERCEIVE THE CUP OF REINCARNATION'S EFFECTS ON IT.
WHILE THE RULERS TRIED TO MAKE AMENDS TIME AND TIME AGAIN,
THE MONARCHS TIRELESSLY REFINED THEIR PLANS...
...UNTIL GOD'S INSTRUMENT WAS RENDERED USELESS.

WAIT... SO YOU'RE SAYING THE CUP OF REINCARNATION HAS A LIMIT?

THERE IS NO SUCH THING AS INFINITE POWER.


JUST LIKE HOW THE ABSOLUTE BEING WAS DEFEATED BY HIS OWN CREATIONS,
ALL POWER HAS AN END.
HOW WERE THE ABSOLUTE BEING'S CREATIONS ABLE TO KILL THEIR CREATOR?
IT'S NO DIFFERENT FROM HOW HUMANS ARE KILLED OR HURT BY MACHINES OF THEIR OWN MAKING.
WE WERE CREATED TO FIGHT, WHICH ENDOWED US WITH MORE THAN ENOUGH POWER TO OVERTHROW OUR CREATOR.

THE MONARCHS TOOK INSPIRATION FROM THIS.
SIMILAR TO HOW THE RULERS STRENGTHENED THIS WORLD BY LENDING HUMANS POWER...
...AND SCATTERING MANA BY KILLING MAGIC BEASTS,
THE MONARCHS BORROWED THE BODIES OF HUMANS TO DESCEND UPON EARTH...
...AND HAD THEIR

ARMY ARRIVE MUCH SOONER THAN THE RULERS HAD EXPECTED.
THEY PLANNED TO USE THE MANA DISSEMINATED BY THE RULERS...
...TO TURN THE ENTIRE EARTH INTO ONE LARGE TRAP.
IN ORDER TO SLAUGHTER THE RULERS' ARMY COMING TO HELP HUMANITY IN ONE GO...
PRECISELY.

A MONARCH POSSESSES ENORMOUS POWER, AND TO CROSS OVER INTO THIS WORLD, THEY NEED A HUMAN VESSEL THAT CAN HANDLE SUCH POWER.

IT IS FOR THIS REASON THAT THE MONARCH OF DESTRUCTION AND I COULDN'T FIND A HOST.

THAT'S WHEN A SKILLED MAGE WORKING UNDER ONE OF THE KINGS CAME TO ME WITH A PROPOSAL.

HE OFFERED TO FIND ME A SUITABLE HUMAN.

AND IN RETURN, THAT MAGE CALLED "THE ARCHITECT" ASKED FOR IMMORTALITY.

HOWEVER, NO LIVING THING COULD BECOME A VESSEL FOR "DEATH."

THE ARCHITECT DESIGNED A SYSTEM TO SEARCH FOR A HUMAN WHO WAS HIGHLY RESPONSIVE TO MANA...
SOMEONE WITH A SUPERIOR PHYSIQUE AND A STRONG MENTALITY.
HE SEARCHED HIGH AND LOW FOR A VESSEL THAT COULD BE MY COUNTERPART, BUT THE PROCESS WAS NOT EASY.

THAT'S WHEN I NOTICED...

...A HUMAN WHO HAD STEPPED BEYOND THE BOUNDARIES OF THE SYSTEM THAT THE ARCHITECT HAD CREATED. A HUMAN WHO HAD DEVIATED FROM ITS RULES AND EXPECTATIONS.

YOU WERE WEAK, AND CONSTANTLY WITHIN DEATH'S REACH.

YET YOU ALWAYS MANAGED TO ESCAPE WITH YOUR LIFE.

I WATCHED YOU.

AND DESPITE THE ARCHITECT'S DISAPPROVAL, I CHOSE YOU.

SWISH

LET ME SAY THIS ONE MORE TIME.

I AM THE RECORD OF YOUR STRUGGLES, THE EVIDENCE OF YOUR RESISTANCE, AND THE REWARD FOR YOUR PAIN.

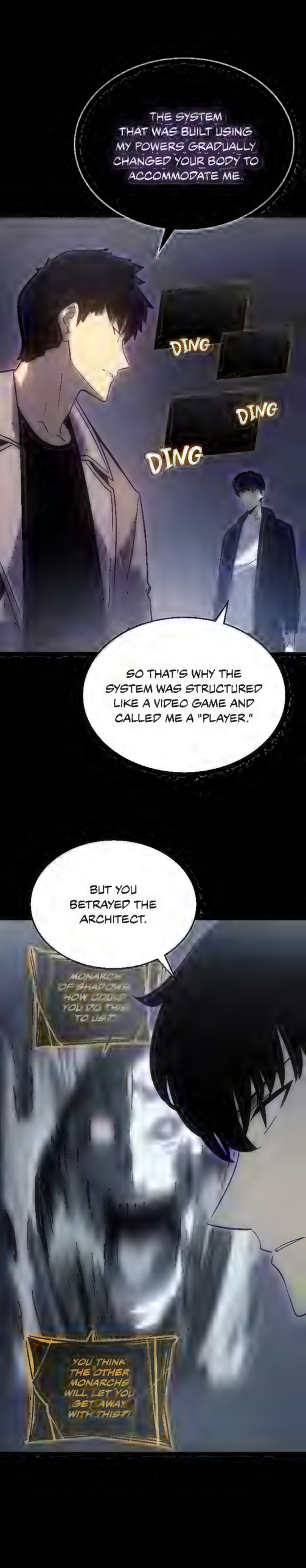
SURE, I BROKE AWAY FROM THE ARCHITECT'S SCHEME,

BUT I DOUBT I WAS STRONG ENOUGH TO RECEIVE YOUR POWERS.

THE ARCHITECT MADE IT POSSIBLE FOR YOU TO ADAPT TO MY STRENGTH...

...USING WHAT HUMANS DO AND LIKE BEST.

RECREATION AND GAMES.


THE SYSTEM THAT WAS BUILT USING MY POWERS GRADUALLY CHANGED YOUR BODY TO ACCOMMODATE ME.
DING
DING
DING
SO THAT'S WHY THE SYSTEM WAS STRUCTURED LIKE A VIDEO GAME AND CALLED ME A "PLAYER."
BUT YOU BETRAYED THE ARCHITECT.
MONARCH OF SHADOWS HOW COULD YOU DO THIS TO US?!
YOU THINK THE OTHER MONARCHS WILL LET YOU GET AWAY WITH THIS?!

WHY?
AN APOLOGY FROM THE RULERS VERSUS THE BETRAYAL OF THE MONARCHS.
AFTER PUTTING OFF CHOOSING A SIDE FOR QUITE SOME TIME...
...I HAD SIMPLY COME TO A DECISION.
AND...

...IT WAS A DECISION I WANTED TO MAKE.

SPENDING TIME WITH YOU BROUGHT ME SO MUCH HAPPINESS.

PERHAPS I DID NOT WANT TO LOSE YOU.

I BECAME YOU, AND YOU BECAME ME.

FSHHH

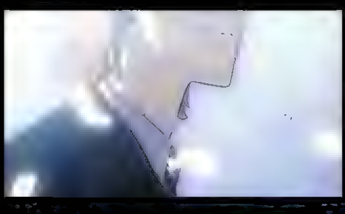
IT WOULDN'T BE STRANGE IF EITHER ONE OF US BECAME THE OWNER OF THIS BODY.

FOR WE ARE ALREADY ONE.
SO I'LL GIVE YOU A CHOICE. YOU DECIDE.
STEP
STAY HERE IN DEATH'S DOMAIN...
...AND REST IN ETERNAL PEACE, ENJOYING THE WONDERFUL DREAMS YOU CREATED.

OR, GO BACK TO REALITY AND FACE YOUR FOES.

YOU SAID YOU CAME TO A DECISION.
BUT NOT ONLY DID YOU NOT STAND WITH THE RULERS,
BUT YOU NO LONGER HAD THE WILL TO FIGHT THEM. SO WHY DID YOU RUN AWAY TO A DIFFERENT WORLD WITH THE MONARCHS?
BECAUSE THERE WAS NO PLACE FOR ME THERE.
MY ANSWER IS THE SAME.

I DON'T
BELONG HERE.



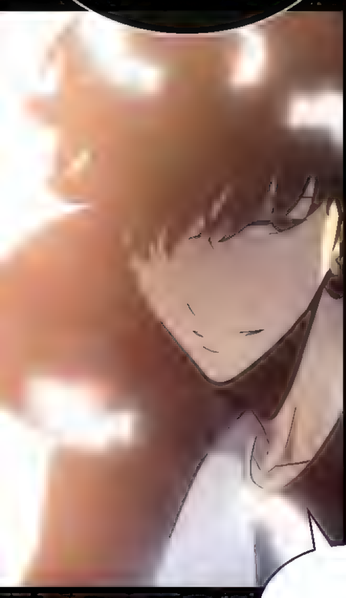
GRIN

WILL THIS BE THE LAST I SEE OF YOU?

I WILL RETURN TO MY ETERNAL REST. BUT YOU, THE MONARCH OF SHADOWS, WILL LIVE AS AN IMMORTAL.

SO I DOUBT OUR PATHS WILL CROSS.

WITH DEATH, YOUR POWER HAS BECOME ABSOLUTE. THE WAY BACK IS-



I KNOW.

BECAUSE I AM YOU.

ARISE.

To Be Continued...

Translator: JJoelle
Editor: Michelle Kim

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